



Pharmacists in Illinois: An Evolving Occupation

by Dennis Hoffman

The job duties of pharmacists in Illinois are rapidly evolving and the overall employment outlook is favorable. A thirty-year plus pharmacist working at a nationwide retail chain states “New skills are being required of pharmacists today. They are not just dispensing medicines, but also providing more services such as immunizations, consulting, and analyzing effects of medications.” Economic indicators predict that pharmacists in Illinois will have promising employment

opportunities and excellent earnings. However, the independent pharmacy retail business is struggling. Another 30-plus-year pharmacist who owns an independent business states, “the profit margin is gone and there is a lack of reimbursement by third-party payers. Independent pharmacists are generally not able to expand into providing the other services that retail chains offer.”

Most pharmacists are employed at retail drugstores, mail-order pharmacies, or

in a health care facility like a hospital, nursing home, mental health institution or health clinic. Pharmacists also work as researchers for pharmaceutical manufacturers, marketing or sales, and health insurance companies. Some pharmacists specialize in drug therapy including home health care monitoring. Working as a pharmacist can also be a good part-time profession, especially for retirees and for families with young children.

Pharmacists not only distribute prescription drugs to individuals; their job duties are changing to include more services such as advising patients, physicians, and other health care workers about drug selection, dosages, interactions and side effects. Pharmacists also monitor the health and progress of patients to ensure the safe and effective use of medicines. Because most medications are produced by pharmaceutical companies, the actual mixing or compounding of ingredients to form medicines is a small part of the job. Pharmacists are responsible for the accuracy of every prescription. They keep confidential computerized records of patient's drug therapies to prevent harmful interactions. A pharmacist that works for a mail-order pharmacy states "All prescriptions will be electronic in the near future which will make medicine distribution safer and more accurate. Currently, about 75 percent of all prescriptions are electronic." Technology in providing pharmacy services has evolved dramatically in recent years. Automated dispensers, computerized physician order entry systems, and pharmacy information systems have all become more universally used.

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Pharmacists must earn a Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) degree from an accredited college or school of pharmacy. To be admitted to a Doctor of Pharmacy program, an applicant must have completed two years of postsecondary study. Many applicants have completed three or more years of study. A state-issued license plus passing a series of examinations is required to practice pharmacy in all states and U.S. territories. The exams include the North American Pharmacist License Exam (NAPLEX) and the Multistate Pharmacy Jurisprudence Exam (MPJE). Some pharmacists continue with a fellowship or residency to expand their knowledge of a specialty. These programs are generally one to two years and allow the pharmacist to acquire clinical experience or specialty pharmacy practice. Others continue their education and acquire a Master of Business Administration (MBA) or Doctorate Degree (PhD). An interesting new trend is that some pharmacists are pursuing a law degree.

Pharmacists work in well-lit and ventilated areas. Many pharmacists spend their workday standing and wear gloves, masks, and other protective equipment when working with sterile or dangerous pharmaceutical products. "Stress is the most difficult part of the job," states one pharmacist. "Stress



from assisting and advising customers, doctors, insurance companies and the shortage of pharmacy technicians in the retail setting." Another pharmacist stated "doing excessive paperwork is very stressful."

Employment Outlook

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that average growth in employment opportunities for pharmacists is 3.1 percent nationwide for the time period from 2014 to 2024. Over 83 percent of the job openings nationwide will be for replacement of current pharmacists. The BLS stated that "Job prospects were good due to the increase in use of prescription drugs and more people receiving

prescription drug insurance coverage.” Pharmacists will be needed in hospitals, clinics, home healthcare, retail chain stores, and mail-order pharmacies. However, employment for pharmacists is expected to decline at independent retail pharmacies.

Comparable employment projections are predicted for pharmacists in Illinois per data from the Illinois Department of Employment Security, Economic Information and Analysis Division (IDES, EI&A). From 2012 to 2022, Illinois is expected to have over 900 new pharmacists and average annual job openings totaling 343 (Table 1). Over 90 of the annual employment needs will be from growth and over 250 from replacement of current workers.

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All ten of the Economic Development Regions in Illinois are expected to

experience employment growth from 2012 to 2022 as stated by IDES, EI&A (Table 1). As expected, most of the available annual positions (250) will be in the heavily populated North East Economic Development Region (Chicago area).

However, numerous job openings annually are also anticipated for the Central (Decatur-Springfield area) Economic Development Region (14), the North Central (Bloomington-Peoria area) Economic Development Region (19), and the Southwestern (Alton-Belleville) Economic Development Region (14).

The Help Wanted Online report each month lists the number of job opportunities in online ads, sorted by occupation. The data is compiled by the Conference Board which is a global, independent business membership and research association. For the month of

May 2016, there were approximately 370 jobs for pharmacists advertised in Illinois. For a four month period from January to April 2016, there were over 1,150 pharmacist employment opportunities listed. Since there are a number of job openings every month in Illinois for this occupation, pharmacists are believed to be in demand today and into the future.

Wages

The Bureau of Labor Statistics stated that in May 2015, pharmacists in the United States had a median average annual income of \$121,500. The 2015 median wage in Illinois is close to the national average at \$121,358. Nationwide, pharmacists in the top 10 percent of wages, earned \$150,550 or more per year.

Entry level wages for pharmacists throughout Illinois generally range

Table 1: Projected Employment for Pharmacists in Illinois

	Base Year	Projected Year	Employment Change		Average Annual Job Openings		
	Employment 2012	Employment 2022	2012-2022 Number	Percent	Growth	Replacements	Total
Illinois	10,542	11,449	907	8.60	91	252	343
Economic Development Regions							
EDR 1 Central	477	496	19	3.98	2	12	14
EDR 2 East Central	226	230	4	1.77	1	5	6
EDR 3 North Central	543	606	63	11.60	6	13	19
EDR 4 North East	7,593	8,307	714	9.4	70	180	250
EDR 5 Northern Stateline	269	295	26	9.67	3	6	9
EDR 6 Northwest	380	387	7	1.84	0	9	9
EDR 7 Southeastern	184	187	3	1.63	0	4	4
EDR 8 Southern	236	254	18	7.63	1	6	7
EDR 9 Southwestern	465	501	36	7.74	3	11	14
EDR 10 West Central	152	171	19	12.50	2	4	6

Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security, Economic Information & Analysis Division

Table 2: Wages for Pharmacists in Illinois

	Entry Wage		Median Wage		Experienced Wage	
	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual
Illinois	\$42.28	\$87,934	\$58.35	\$121,358	\$62.51	\$130,019
Economic Development Regions						
EDR 1 Central	\$49.23	\$102,388	\$60.83	\$126,535	\$65.12	\$135,458
EDR 2 East Central	\$45.53	\$94,698	\$58.25	\$121,166	\$61.87	\$128,694
EDR 3 North Central	\$45.56	\$94,774	\$59.42	\$123,584	\$63.24	\$131,549
EDR 4 North East	\$40.71	\$84,674	\$57.72	\$120,063	\$62.03	\$129,028
EDR 5 Northern Stateline	\$50.53	\$105,113	\$59.75	\$124,283	\$62.69	\$130,401
EDR 6 Northwest	\$38.01	\$79,051	\$56.53	\$117,575	\$63.15	\$131,346
EDR 7 Southeastern	\$50.01	\$104,023	\$63.82	\$132,747	\$66.86	\$139,069
EDR 8 Southern	\$46.13	\$95,960	\$59.87	\$124,537	\$63.66	\$132,414
EDR 9 Southwestern	\$46.20	\$96,086	\$60.71	\$126,268	\$63.76	\$132,611
EDR 10 West Central	\$47.53	\$98,871	\$61.83	\$128,599	\$65.62	\$136,497

Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security, Economic Information & Analysis Division

between \$80,000 and \$105,000 per year (Table 2) according to the Illinois Department of Employment Security, Economic Information and Analysis Division Occupational Employment Survey. Experienced annual wages range between \$128,000 and \$139,000 in Illinois. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the Illinois median household income in 2014 was \$57,458. Thus, the overall earnings for pharmacists, including entry-level wages, are substantially above incomes for most occupations.

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Earnings for pharmacists are very competitive throughout the 10 economic development regions (Table 2). Although the North East Economic Development Region has most of the employment opportunities and largest population, entry level and experienced wages in most of the other economic development regions are equal to or notably higher than those in the North East Economic Development

Region. The average entry wage for pharmacists in the Central Economic Development Region, the Northern Stateline Economic Development Region, and the Southeastern Economic Development Region is over \$100,000 annually. This is significantly greater than the statewide entry wage of \$87,934 and the North East Economic Development Region entry wage of \$84,674. The Illinois average annual experienced wage for pharmacists in 2015 is \$130,019. Experienced wages in seven of the 10 Economic Development Regions are greater than the statewide wage with the Southeastern Economic Development Region the highest at \$139,069. High annual experienced wages are also noted in the Central Economic Development Region (\$135,458) and the West Central Economic Development Region (\$136,497). The North East Economic Development Region annual experienced wage was \$129,028. Several of the interviewed pharmacists noted that they were offered higher salaries in some of the

rural/small city areas due to a shortage of qualified applicants, especially for retail trade pharmacists. The supply/demand rule of economics is very evident with the pharmacist occupation in terms of location in the state.

Summary

The career outlook for pharmacists is overall very positive with the forecast not as favorable for the pharmacists working for independent pharmacies. Long-term employment

projections, current job openings, and opinions of current pharmacists are all very optimistic. Personnel in this career are very confident about the possibilities and future growth, as the usage of prescription drugs continues to increase and the American population ages. The pharmacy profession is advancing with technology and developing additional duties primarily consulting, providing immunizations, and analyzing data. Since wages at all levels are significantly greater than overall average wages for workers, income satisfaction and contentment is generally a positive for workers. One pharmacist states that after 30 years, it has been a great occupation and he still enjoys telling people about the profession.

Dennis Hoffman is an IDES Labor Market Economist in Mt. Vernon, IL